1:Gordon E-4, 5 (no date) 1907 ART Khasi ART

villages, such as Shella, Sheyong, Umnieh, and in Nongah to the Jaintia Hills.

Origin.

173 The origin of the Khasis is a very vexed question. Although it is probable that the Khasis have inhabited their present abode for at any rate a considerable period, there seems to be a fairly general belief amongst them that they originally came from elsewhere. The Rev. H. Roberts, in the introduction to his Khasi Grammar, states that "tradition, such as it is, connects them politically with the Burmese, to whose king they were up to a comparatively recent date rendering homage, by sending him an annual tribute in the shape of an ass, as an emblem merely of submission." Another tradition points out the north as the direction from which they migrated, and Sylhet as the terminus of their wanderings, from which they were ultimately driven back into their present hill fastnesses by a great flood, after a more or less peaceful occupation of that district. It was on the occasion of this great flood, the legend runs, that the Khasi lost the art of writing, the Khasi losing his book whilst he was swimming at the time of this flood, whereas the Bengali managed to preserve his. Owing to the Khasis having possessed no written character before the advent of the Welsh missionaries, there are no histories as in the case with the Ahoms of the Assam Valley, and therefore no record of their journeys.

114 Mr. Shadwell, the oldest living authority we have on the 173 Khasis, and one who has been in close touch with the people for more than half a century, mentions a tradition amongst them that they originally came into Assam from Burma *viâ* the Patkoi range, having followed the route of one of the Burmese invasions. Mr. Shadwell has heard them mention the name Patkoi as a hill they met with on their journey. All this sort of 144 thing is, however, inexpressibly vague. In the chapter dealing 173 with "Affinities" have been given some reasons for supposing that the Khasis and other tribes of the Mon-Anam family, originally occupied a large portion of the Indian continent. Where the actual cradle of the Mon-Anam race was, is as

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impossible to state, as it is to fix upon the exact tract of country from which the Aryans sprang. With reference to the Khasi branch of the Mon-Annam family, it would seem reasonable to suppose that if they are not the autochthons of a portion of the hills on the southern bank of the Brahmaputra, and if they migrated to Assam from some other country, it is not unlikely that they followed the direction of the different irruptions of foreign peoples into Assam of which we have authentic data, i.e. from south-east to north-west, as was the case with the Ahom invaders of Assam who invaded Assam from their settlements in the Shan States *viâ* the Patkoi range, the different Burmese invasions, the movements of the Khamtis and, again, the Singphos, from the country to the east of the Hukong Valley. Whether the first comers of the Khasis, the Mons, moved to their present abode from China, whether they are the aborigines of the portion of Burma they at present occupy, or were one of the races "of Turanian origin" who, as Forbes thinks, originally occupied the valley of the Ganges before the Aryan invasion, must be left to others more qualified than myself to determine. Further, it is difficult to clear up the mystery of the survival, in an isolated position, of people like the Ho-Mundas, whose language and certain customs exhibit points of similarity with those of the Khasis, in close proximity to the Dravidian tribes and at a great distance from the Khasis, there being no people who exhibit similar characteristics inhabiting countries situated in between; but we can, I think, reasonably suppose that the Khasis are an offshoot of the Mon people of Further India in the light of the historical fact I have quoted, i.e. that the movements of races into Assam have usually, although not invariably, taken place from the east, and not from the west. The tendency for outside people to move into Assam from the east still continues.

Appendix.

The late Mr. S. E. Peal, F.R.G.S., in an interesting and suggestive paper published in the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1896, drew attention to certain illustrations of

1:Gordon E-4, 9 (no date) 1907 AR? Sheet AR?

642 occurring in the Sienship, three *lyngdoks* and two *mantris* assemble and decide who is to be Siem. They then summon the sirdars of villages to meet them in durbar and obtain the approval of the latter to their nomination. If the sirdars do not approve, the combined durbar then decides who is to become
643 Siem. In Nongpyung there is a tradition that two sisters, Ka Jah and Ka Jem, came to the village of Nongpyung, which was then ruled by two *lyngdoks*, and that the latter, having ascertained that the two sisters were of royal birth, married them. They then travelled to other villages and obtained the consent of the *lyngdoks* of these villages to the formation of all their villages into a State of which Nongpyung became the capital, and over which U Sugi Shaiyng, the son of Ka Jem, was appointed Siem by the five principal *lyngdoks*. After some generations the lyngdoh of Mairang with his villages became subject to the Siem of Nonglkdew, an event which finds mention in the annals of the Nonglkhow State as the conquest of the territory of the "Black" Siem of Nongpyung. Another lyngdoh was appointed in place of the one whose territory had been thus annexed.

642 In the Mawiang State the ancient custom was that six headmen
[643] appointed the Siem subject to the approval of the people of the
644 Sienship. In the Nobosohpoh State there are two Siem families, the "Black" and the "White," from either of which it has apparently been the custom for the people to select a Siem, as they wished. In Mawryngtein the electors of the Siem are the heads of the four principal clans in the State. On a recent occasion, the electors being equally divided regarding the appointment of a Siem, it was necessary to appeal to the people of the State. In Langrin there are, as in Mahram and Nobosohpoh, two main branches of the Siem family, i.e. the
[641] "Black" and the "White" Siems. Here there is no special electoral body; all the adults of the state have the right to vote at the election of a Siem. In Bhawal State Siems are appointed by the heads of eight clans whose decision is apparently final, provided that it is unanimous. In Malai-Sohmat a bare majority of the heads of six clans would be sufficient for the election of a Siem. Presumably both in Bhawal and Malai-Sohmat, if the electors were equally divided, there would be an appeal to the people.

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or difference. It is owing to these three different names being used for the same people that there has been so much confusion about Lyngams previously; e.g. at one census they were named Synteng, at another they received the appellation of Garo, and at a third enumeration they were called Khasis. In Section I. the habitat of the Lyngams has been roughly defined. It is impossible to define the Lyngam country exactly, because these people are continually shifting their village sites owing to the exigencies of jhoom cultivation, which has been described in Section II. Some of the Lyngams preserve a tradition that they originally came from the Kamrup plains. It is interesting that a people, like the Garos in so many respects, should have the same idea as the Garos as to the hills on the south bank of the Brahmaputra not always having been their abode. The Garo legend is that they dwelt for some years in the Goalpara and Kamrup plains after they descended from Thibet, and before they moved to the Garo Hills; and there is considerable evidence of their occupation of both districts in the shape of certain Garo villages on both banks of the Brahmaputra for some little distance up the river. If, as I suspect, the Lyngams are an offshoot of the Garos, it is, perhaps, possible that they entered the Khasi Hills south in the same way as the Garos entered the hill district to which they have given their name. The Lyngams are much darker than the Khasis, and possess the Tibeto-Burman type of feature often to a marked degree. It is not extraordinary that they should have adopted some of the Khasi customs, for the Khasis, being the stronger people, would in course of time be bound to influence them in this respect. That the Lyngams observe the matriarchate and erect (some class) memorial stones is not peculiar, because the Garos, like the Khasis, are also a matriarchal people (to a limited degree), and the custom of erecting memorial stones is not confined to the Khasis, for other hill tribes in Assam observe the practice, e.g. certain Naga tribes and the Mikirs; and the Garos themselves put up carved posts, called *bima*, in honour of the departed. Although there is not much intermarriage between the Khasis and the Lyngams nowadays, perhaps in days gone by there was a mixture of blood, the result being the hybrid race we are now

[507] The Religious Life of the Khasi

(504)

By P. F. Stegmiller, Apostolic Missionary, S.D.S., of Assam (India).

I. Religion in General

1. Gods, Spirits, Souls.
2. Methods of Warding Off Evil Spirits.
3. Taboos (eang).
4. Egg Throwing (shat-pylleng).
5. The Sacrifice of the Rooster (jinghnia sylar).
6. Discovering the Spirits that Need Appeasing (shelshnoid).
7. Prayer of Thanks after Receiving Good Health.

II. Religion in Various Phases of Life.

1. Giving a Name (tap lubri tap kyrteng).
2. Sacrifices during the Illness of a Member of the Family.
3. Sacrifices and Ceremonies at Death.
4. Cremation (ka jingthang).
5. Burial of the Bones.
   a) First Burial (maw shying).
   b) Second Burial (maw phew).
   c) Third Burial (maw bah).

I. Religion in General

1. Gods, Spirits, Souls.

•173 771 An explanation about the origin of their religion is not to be expected from the Khasi themselves. Since they do not have a system of writing, nor idols or temples, one must turn entirely to their oral traditions.

9: Godwin-Austen G-3 (no date) 1872 ART Khasi ART

nounce the hard G; and in all words of Hindustani origin this letter has the sound of K. 101 [191]

They are called by the tribes of Kúkis and Nágas on the west "Káro", the name they themselves have for the whole mass of hill people on their western side, the Gáros, though as we pass towards their confines, we find the names of local clans giving way to this general term which was not known to some of the villagers of West Nongstoin, who call the Gáros "Dékor."

The Gáro appellation for the Khásis is "Dikkil" or "Digil"; and it was very interesting to find, after visiting the villages of both, that they mutually fear each other, and consequently border raids never occur. The Gáros owned that they feared the bow and arrow of their neighbour, a weapon they themselves are unacquainted with the use of.

The Khásis always point to the east as the quarter from which they emigrated, but there is very little, if any, similarity with the languages of the people now occupying the hills on that side. [178] [197]

Before entering further on the subject matter of this paper, I must request my hearers or readers to remember that having no knowledge colloquially of the Khasi language, the information I give was obtained from natives who understood either English or Hindustani well. The greater part of the information was given me by a very intelligent man, a native inspecter of schools in the district; thus I hope that all errors that exist may be hereafter corrected by others who have been able to elucidate with greater exactness the meaning of their many different rites and superstitions. 115

Certainly the most striking objects of interest in the Khási Hills are the upright stone monuments that are to be seen all over the country; these, set up by the wayside, or in the villages, more frequently cutting the sky on prominent hills, with the large slabs horizontally set before them, at once recall the Druidical remains of our own island, northern France, etc., and lead one to marvel at the similarity of the customs, and to inquire its origin and design. Many who visit those hills take it at once for granted that they are the graves of illustrious men, or, after a vain endeavour to get some information from the coolies about them, let the matter rest, or finally believe that the ashes of the dead, to whose memory the monoliths are erected, are buried under the flat kind of altar or dolmen seen in front. 764 211

It is always a very difficult matter to obtain information from semi-civilised people on such a subject as their religious rites, especially if the inquirer is ignorant of their language. A slight knowledge of Hindustani on the part of the Khásia villager, renders the attempt still more hopeless, and the information given quite erroneous.

to: McCormack E-4,5 (1956-1958) 1964
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[P. 106 B]

1965-2): 2; Barth 1982.] **Demography.** According to the 1981 census of India, the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District contained 221,982 Khasis and 97,532 Syntengs. Pnars and Jaintias (India [Republic] 1982-87). These figures, together with those for Khasis enumerated in Cachar (4,005), Mikir and North Cachar Hills (407), Lakhimpur (287), Sibsagar (270), and Darrang (211) districts, and those for Syntengs enumerated in Mikir and North Cachar District (404), yield a total of 205,224 Khasis. **History and cultural relations.** Khasis believe that they had supernatural origin in Khasi Hills (see Gait 1926: 280 for historical evidence, and Roy 1930: 5-9 for myth, but see also Costa 1886, 1900; Gordon 1907: 10-11, and Chatterji 1951: 12). Khasi tradition also states that in early times they moved gradually from east to west, from Jaintia toward Khasi Hills, in the practice of swidden agriculture (Gatphoh 1947: 97-98). The salient fact of known Khasi history, which begins generally in the mid-sixteenth century A.D. when there already existed the present-day 25 native Khasi chiefdoms, is the distinctive line of development followed by the separate kingdom of Jaintia. To the north, Jaintia was successively tributary, in part or in whole, to the Kachari kingdom (ca. 1250 A.D.), the Koch kingdom (strongest ca. 1580 A.D.), and the Ahom kingdom (strongest ca. 1700 A.D.) (Shakespear 1914: Map 1). To the south, about 1500 A.D., Jaintia extended its rule over a tract of Sylhet, which was populated by Hindus and Muslims, and saw its kings fall thereafter under Brahmanic influence. In the early 1800s, Jaintia became involved in the fratricidal strife then prevalent in the ruling family of Manipur. In 1835, after the Jaintia king ignored British warnings not to seize British subjects for human sacrifice, Jaintia was punished by the British annexation of the Jaintia parganas in Sylhet. The Jaintia king then voluntarily turned over to the British the hills area of his domain, so that the whole of Jaintia became part of British India and, in 1860, came to be taxed as such, although the Jaintias were otherwise allowed to maintain their traditional system of village government. • By contrast, the remaining Khasi states had few formal external relations until British times. Khasis resided and traded in both the Brahmaputra and Sylhet valleys, but were basically turned inward on their own hills, where warfare between villages and between the states was apparently common. Khasis came into indirect relation with the British in 1788, when Sylhet and its markets became part of British India. In the 1790s, stepped-up Khasi raids into Sylhet caused the British to throw up a deterring line of forts along the foothills. Later, it became necessary to place an embargo on Khasi products in the Sylhet markets. In 1827, the British penetrated into western Khasi Hills by negotiating with the Khasi chief of Nongkhlaw **State** to build a road through his territory, linking the recently annexed Brahmaputra valley with Calcutta. For three decades

20: Hunter G-4 (no date) 1897 AR7 Khasi AR7

sense) or juxtapositions of roots which have not thereby suffered either obscuration or absorption—that is to say, they are all, with a few exceptions, reducible to their constituent root words, which are still "current coin," and retain their power as independent vocables. The cases in which obscuration and "fusion" of roots have taken place are confined to—(1) the noun prefix *jing*, expressing abstract ideas; (2) the verbal prefixes *hyn*, *kyn*, *lyn*, *ryn*, *syn*, *tyn*, *pyn*, *byr*, *kyr*, *lyr*, *pyr*, *syr*, *tyr*, expressing causation, intensification, and contrariety. The language is found purest at Cherrá Púnjí. The Khásiás have no written character or literature of any kind of their own. Tradition says that all was lost while they were yet masters of the plains, whence they were driven by a general catastrophe or deluge to their present fastnesses in the hills. The following works on the language have been published: *Khási Grammar*, *Anglo-Khási Dictionary*, *Khási Primer* (Parts I. and II., with Vocabulary),—all issued by the Calcutta School-Book Society; *Khási English Dictionary* (in preparation), and an *Anglo-Khási First Book*.

'CUSTOMS REGARDING INHERITANCE.—A Khásiá, whether married or single, if he makes his mother's house his home, is said to be earning for his *kur*, *i.e.* for his mother, or his brothers and sisters, or his mother's relatives. On his death his property goes to his mother, if living; if not, to the grandmother; if she is not living, then to his sisters; should his sisters also be dead, to his sisters' children. Should the deceased have left no sisters, the property goes to the brothers; should he have no brothers or should they be dead, the property descends to his aunts, or to their children if the aunts are not living; should the aunts have left no children, the property descends to the grandmother's or great-grandmother's sisters or children. The property of a female on her death goes to her mother, if the deceased have no children; or if the mother of the deceased is not living, the property goes to the brothers and sisters; if the sisters are dead, then their children become the heirs. If there are no such children, the property devolves as in the case of males. When a man is not living in his mother's house, but in that of his wife, he cares for his wife and children. On his death his property descends to his wife, with the exception of the ornaments and clothing worn by him during his lifetime, which go to the brothers and sisters or other relatives of the deceased. Should the deceased have been a widower, the property goes to his children, and in their absence

21: Ehrenfels E-4,5 (1950) 1953 AR7 Khasi AR7

on a historical past, different from that of the Khasi proper, the former having been ruled by the powerful, but somewhat Hinduised dynasty of the Jaintia Rajas until the Jaintia Wars of the British; the latter by small independent chiefs. Yet Jaintia social organization appears on the whole to preserve the matrilineal social structure clearer and to be less influenced by plains-acculturation, than that of the Khasi, though a few features of Brahmanical religious observances and also some traces of racial admixture are found in the immediate vicinity of Jowei, the former summer residence of the Jaintia Rajas. Stronger no doubt, than this influence, was that exercised by the British and non-Assamese Indians in the provincial capital Shillong since 1866. Methods of agriculture and other aspects of material civilization differ but little in the Jaintia- and Khasi plateau-areas.

The same cannot be said of both: the Wâr-Khasi and Wâr-Jaintias. Linguistically their affiliations are with the Khasi or Jaintias respectively, in the plateau-areas. Economically, however, both Wâr-groups form a separate pan-leaf cultivating unit in the little accessible steep southern slopes of the Khasi- and Jaintia Hill massif. Both Wâr-groups live in the environment of luscious tropical flora and fauna, sharply differentiated from the cool, barren plateau with its perennial winds and the heroic, if solitary beauty of its highland heaths, which forms the background of both the Khasi- and Jaintia plateau-groups.

The age of the Wâr-Khasi and -Jaintias, as one independent economic, — and two half-independent dialectical linguistic entities, is an intricate problem. The two Wâr-groups subsist on pan-leaf cultivation as a money crop, grown in the thick tree-gardens as creepers; not on food-cultivation, as do the plateau-groups, because there is insufficient space on the steep slopes, for vegetable gardens or -fields. The pan-leaf cultivators therefore depend on food, purchased from outside. The slopes seem to have been uninhabited until not long ago. Yet pan-leaf chewing is such an integral part of Khasi life, that until quite recently, and occasionally even now, a distance between two places is not measured by the number of hours used for walking, but by the number of betelnut- and pan-leaf packages, consumed on the way. Also the common benediction among Khasi expresses the wish that so and so may eat pan in the Garden of God. Yet pan-cultivation and the settlements of the Wâr-people as pan-leaf cultivators in the southern slopes seem comparatively young. Pan-cultivation on the plateau is impracticable. It is therefore possible that pan was for a long time only a much valued import article from the plains, bartered against Khasi ore and iron tools, though it is now an export article from the Wâr-country, brought to the markets of the plains, by both Wâr-Khasi and Wâr-Jaintia women and men.

According to a tradition, across which I came among the Nonglamin clan of the Nongmuker village, the ancestors of the present Wâr people were on the plateau at a time when no pan-cultivation was going on in the slopes and none of the present big estates of pan-tree gardens was yet held by their present (Wâr-) owners. A not distant ancestor of a Nonglamin clan-member who about two or three generations ago told the story to U' Siang (one of

21: Ehrenfels E-4,5 (1950) 1953 AR7 Khasi AR7

my informants at Pʻadu), in the year 1933, is said to have begun the cultivation of yam (*shnia*) and millets (*kner*) in the then uncultivated slopes. He and his people used to be, on this account, ridiculed as monkeys (*shriah*). The Nonglamin clan took later to pan-leaf-, and arecanut-cultivation and became one of the richest landowners of the Wâr-country. Others followed and imitated them. This clan (*kur*) is now residing at Nongtalang, about ten miles east of Pʻada in the Wâr-Jaintia slopes.

This possibility of a comparatively recent origin of the now economically independent Wâr-groups among the Khasi speaking peoples is of importance to the question of some different terms in kinship terminology which the following lists will show.

Comments on other features in the relationship terminology, bearing on sociological or historical problems of either among the four Khasi speaking groups under discussion, are being hinted at in the text of the lists itself and further discussed in Part Three of the present paper, following the lists of kinship terms.